

**THE HISTORY OF *PHYLLONORYCTER SAGITELLA*  
(BJERKANDER, 1790) (LEP.: GRACILLARIIDAE)  
IN WORCESTERSHIRE**

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*"Sycamores", Old Rectory Gardens, Leigh, Worcestershire WR6 5LD.*

THIS SPECIES was first recorded in Britain by L. Price (1977) who found mines in aspen (*Populus tremula*) near Dymock, Gloucestershire in early July 1955 and bred moths from these in August of the same year. More were found in July 1956 with moths emerging in August and September. Price thought that they were *Phyllonorycter comparella* (Dup.) until they were recognised by John Bradley in 1976 as being *P. sagitella* and new to the British Isles.

I found mines common very locally in aspen near Pershore, Worcestershire in July 1976. I had just started collecting microlepidoptera that year and was similarly pleased to have found what I also thought was *comparella*, until Mr Price's article appeared in 1977. I bred a lot of specimens but as I was going on holiday I set two and let the rest go! My moths emerged at the end of July 1976 in that very hot summer.

Since then I have looked at the aspens at this same site almost every year without ever seeing any sign of it. There had been no trace of any autumn mines there in 1976 which surprised me, as I assumed I was finding the first generation of a bivoltine insect.

The only other British record of this species was by Michaelis in Denbighshire, North Wales in 1978 (Michaelis, 1979). There is no data recorded of which month it was, and rumour has it that the site has now vanished under a traffic island. Unfortunately the author has now passed on.

Last year, on 3.ix.1995, I visited the same site near Pershore again and was amazed to find, at the end of another very hot summer, that more *sagitella* mines had appeared in exactly the same small group of now much bigger trees. I found far fewer mines, six in all, and bred two moths and three parasites on 23.ix.1995 and 26.ix.1995. A further visit with Dr M.W. Harper on 21.ix.1995 revealed more mines (about ten in all), all of which had recently been vacated. So the moth is resident here and must have survived in small numbers perhaps nearby since 1976. There are about a dozen aspens of the edge on an unimproved pasture, with others along the edge of the road alongside the field next to woodland. The latter has been cleared of its shrub layer so no aspens now occur within it, but there is another larger wood a mile down the road which might be a source. I have searched a lot of woodland elsewhere in the county over twenty years, and although many contain aspen in plenty, I have not found any *sagitella* mines, and therefore it remains for some reason a very scarce and local insect.

While looking through the insect collection at Worcester Museum I found four specimens of *sagitella* which seem to have been collected by a local

Worcester entomologist, J.E. Fletcher, and are labelled "ex. *Populus tremula*, Worcs.". Three are dated "6.8.1876", and one "4.8.1876". I am not certain if this was date of emergence or collection. So *sagitella* has, it seems, been a British insect for a long time, and is clearly not a recent colonist.

The other interesting problem concerns its voltinism. There was no sign of old July mines in September 1995, and no later ones in 1976. Price's mines were found in July, as were mine in 1976, but I wonder if it is univoltine, with the imago overwintering, as in *comparella*? I have never found the latter so I do not know if it always has two generations. Perhaps *sagitella* likes really hot summers and has a variable time of emergence, and maybe the best time to look for the mines most years is in September.

*Salix* feeding *Phyllonorycter* occasionally mine aspen and *P. hilarella* (Zett.) has been bred from aspen by Dr M.W. Harper (*pers. comm.*). However *sagitella* mines are quite distinctive as they are very flat, hardly contorting the upper surface of the leaf, and the underside is smooth and pale.

#### References

- Michaelis, H.N., 1979. Exhibit – the 1978 Annual Exhibition. *Proceedings and Translations of the British Entomological and Natural History Society*. **12**: 9.
- Price, L. 1977. *Phyllonorycter sagitella* (Bjerkander, 1790) = *tremulae* Zeller, 1846 (Lep.: Gracillariidae): A species new to Britain. *Entomologist's Record & Journal of Variation*. **89**: 106-107.

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### Red Admiral butterfly *Vanessa atalanta* (L.) (Lep.: Nymphalidae in January

On Sunday 14 January 1996, a sunny day when the temperature in central London was recorded as reaching 13°C, I watched a Red Admiral butterfly in my garden at Orpington, on the outskirts of London. A few days later, on 17 January, I saw another butterfly sunning itself on the wall of our garage. Evidently the unusually warm and mild weather at that time had interrupted the winter slumbers of one or more individuals attempting to hibernate.

There are numerous reports in the literature of this butterfly species attempting to overwinter, the latest date for the London area being in February at Ruislip (Plant, 1987. *Butterflies of the London Area*. London Natural History Society). Whether or not the Orpington examples managed to resume their hibernation during the cold spell in February 1996 and survive to the spring must be in doubt. Plant (*op. cit.*) states that "There remains no confirmed records of Red Admirals truly surviving the winter in the London area."— PETER GANN, 11 Honeybourne Way, Petts Wood, Orpington, Kent BR5 1EZ.